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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CROCKER'S MEETING WITH COUNCIL OF
REPRESENTATIVES SPEAKER MASHADANI, JULY 14, 2008

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Mashadani confirmed he intends to bring the provincial elections law to an item-by-item vote on July 15. He expects passage if he gets a quorum. Mashadani was gloomy about Sunni parties' prospects in the elections, as they lack money compared with Shia parties that are, he said, fueled by patronage and Iranian money. For the continuing delays in Tawafuq's return to government, Mashadani blamed bloc leaders who failed to consult with their own members. He was likewise downbeat about the prospects for passing a bilateral security agreement this year. The often dramatic Mashadani, who described himself as "boiling with rage" and providing the "true message of the Sunni people," spent much of the 90-minute meeting complaining about Sunni parties' lack of financing, the "imbalance" in governing structures and the United States' failure to recognize the Sunnis as its true allies in Iraq. End Summary.

Elections law: pressing for a vote

2. (C) On July 14, Ambassador met with Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud Mashadani in the latter's residence. The Ambassador was accompanied by NSC Senior Director Brett McGurk. Opening with the provincial elections law, Mashadani confirmed that a five-hour negotiating session on July 13 had failed to resolve the Kirkuk issue, and that he would therefore bring the law to an item-by-item vote on Tuesday, July 15, provided he can muster a quorum. Implying that the Kurds might boycott the session, Mashadani claimed the ability to find a quorum without them. Ramming the law through without the Kurds, however, would not be desirable, he said.

3. (C) Mashadani outlined four options for dealing with the Kirkuk issue. First, just go ahead with the elections ("not recommended," he remarked); second, delay elections in Kirkuk without conditions ("we can't do this"); third, divide Kirkuk into four electoral districts (also "not recommended"); finally, postpone elections in Kirkuk "within some framework of controls." This was the option Mashadani favored and thought would be adopted.

4. (C) As for the elements of the "framework of controls," Mashadani listed a determination by a special commission of who is a Kirkuk resident, and a census of Kirkuk (as in the past, Mashadani predicted this could be done in three or four months). He also listed the 32-32-32-4 apportioning of seats favored by Arabs and Turcomen. Asked whether all sides accepted this "framework," Mashadani claimed "a certain degree of acceptance by all sides," but acknowledged there was not full agreement. He claimed, though, that the plan "gives dignity to each side." Observing that Arabs are afraid the Kurds want Kirkuk, he speculated that the city might be joined to Sulaimaniya (NFI).

¶15. (C) The Ambassador stressed the importance of adopting an elections law before the CoR recesses for the summer in August. Referring to the (originally Turkish) 32-32-32-4 formula, the Ambassador said that the U.S. had been talking to the Turks, asking them to urge more flexibility on the Turcomen. Mashadani agreed on the need to have a law before the break, saying he "wouldn't accept" failure.

But what then?

¶16. (C) Mashadani then turned to his fears about the outcome of the provincial elections themselves, a theme he returned to repeatedly, and with some warmth, throughout the meeting. He argued that Sunni parties were at a disadvantage compared with Shia parties, which enjoyed both patronage flowing from the ministries they controlled and financing from Iran. Without explicitly asking for U.S. financing, Mashadani urged the U.S. to "right the balance" by supporting its "true allies," the ones who (through Awakening Councils) had defeated Al Qaeda alongside the U.S.

¶17. (C) The Ambassador pointed out that foreign financing of election campaigns was forbidden in Iraq. Mashadani agreed, but claimed that the Iranians find other means to get money to Shia parties. Concerning the control of ministries, the Ambassador pointed out that it was the Sunnis (Tawafuq) who had removed themselves from government. He insisted on the importance of elections to Iraq's political development and to the Sunnis themselves.

Tawafuq leaders ignoring back-benchers

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¶18. (C) The mention of Tawafuq led to a discussion of the continuing delays in its return to government. Mashadani blamed bloc leaders who, he said, had negotiated the return with PM Maliki, but had not consulted with their own members.

As a result, he said, Tawafuq was divided within itself about the proposed slate of ministers. Mashadani predicted a large exodus of Tawafuq members. The Ambassador remarked that a return to government was in Tawafuq's own interest, particularly in this pre-electoral period. Mashadani agreed, saying that a solution must be found in the next few days.

Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA)

¶19. (C) Mashadani deplored Sunni opposition to an SFA, claiming he told his colleagues that they should be grateful for the American presence, without which "they would be nobody." "Would you give Baghdad to the Persians?" by throwing the Americans out, he had asked them. Mashadani blamed propaganda and remarks by the government (especially "pro-Iranian" national security advisor Mowaffak Al-Rubaie) for the fact that "95 percent of the street and 95 percent of the news-sites" oppose an agreement with the U.S.

¶10. (C) The Ambassador said that he had spoken to PM Maliki and to other members of the Executive Council. They hoped for an agreement on tactics to increase support for an SFA. Mashadani retorted "they are not capable of passing this agreement." It would be impossible to pass an SFA this year, he continued, "except on one condition." Mashadani thought that an agreement among some elements of Tawafuq (like himself), Saleh al-Mutlaq, Ayad Allawi and Fadhila might do the trick, if such an accord could be reached. All these groups and people, Mashadani argued, fear the departure of U.S. forces because that would amount to "a coup d'etat for Dawa and Iran."

Regional matters

¶11. (C) Mashadani pointed to Iran's diplomatic presence in Baghdad, and to the paucity of Arab embassies. He blamed Arabs' fear of the Iranians for their reluctance to open embassies in Baghdad. He urged the U.S. to press the Saudis to open an Embassy. The Ambassador agreed on the necessity of a greater Arab presence in Iraq, and said the Iranian presence was not an excuse for the Arabs not to come.

Remarks to press

¶12. (SBU) After the meeting, Mashadani addressed a small number of journalists waiting in his home. For some reason, he emphasized encouraging foreign investment (which had not been discussed) in his account of the meeting just ended. In his own remarks, Ambassador Crocker stressed the opportunities opened for Iraqis by recent improvements in security, as well as the importance of the upcoming elections.
CROCKER